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WHEN YOU BUY SHEETS

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The merchandizing custom of holding annual "white sales" of cotton and linen in January has led many housekeepers to depend on these sales for replenishing their stock of sheets and pillow cases, towels, table linen and other household "linen". Not all of the goods offered at such sales, however, are real bargains, by any means. Sometimes inferior, light weight, poorly constructed articles are offered with special inducements to buy, and it is important that the housewife be a good judge of quality and real values when she goes to a "white sale." Some day, perhaps we shall have labels on sheets and other household articles telling us plainly all we should know about the grade or quality of each article. In the meantime we can only look at certain points attentively and try to judge for ourselves.

Sheets are one of the most important items on the January shopping list, because we buy so many of them over a term of housekeeping years. Every home requires at least 3 or 4 sheets to a bed -- to allow for those in use, those in the laundry, and those in reserve for emergencies. Some of these are constantly needing replacement because of ordinary wear and tear in usage and washing.

The price of a sheet is not a reliable guide to its quality. Construction is a more significant factor in determining how a sheet will wear -- that is, thread count, tensile strength, filling or sizing, and weight. The Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture has cooperated in several studies of the wearing qualities of sheets and suggests the following points for the buyer to keep in mind when shopping for sheets.

"Be sure you know the size of the bed before buying sheets for it. A sheet that is too small to be tucked in well under the mattress is a poor investment. Lengths of sheets are given in terms of the length before hemming. For a stand-

ard mattress 74 inches long and 5 inches thick, a 108-inch sheet allows 10 inches for hem and shrinkage, and a 7-inch tuck-in at the top and bottom. For single beds buy sheets 63 inches wide, for three-quarters or wide twin beds, 72 inches, and for double beds, 81 inches.

"By thread count is meant the number of yarns to the inch, which indicates the relative fineness and closeness of the weave. An average number of warp or lengthwise yarns is 73, and of filling or crosswise yarns, 62.

"By tensile strength is meant the measure in pounds of the pull the fabric will stand before it breaks. The retailer will seldom know this. Fifty-three and fifty pounds respectively for warp and filling yarns are average tensile strengths. Some day tensile strength will be stated in the label.

"In order to improve the appearance of a loosely woven, poor quality of sheeting, manufacturers sometimes add a sizing of starch, china clay, or some other substance. This may make the material seem heavy and give it a smooth finish. The sizing washes out when the sheet is laundered, so that afterward a heavily sized sheet is sleazy and fuzzy in appearance. Excessive sizing can be rubbed off in powder form between the hands. So try to choose sheets with little or no sizing or filling.

"The weight of an unsized sheet varies from about 3-1/4 to 5-1/4 ounces per square yard of sheeting. As weight is important, sizing helps to deceive the buyer by making the sheet seem heavier than it really is.

"Choose fabrics which are properly made. The best yarns are regular in diameter, contain few short fibers, have their fibers mixed uniformly, and are arranged as nearly parallel as possible. Poor construction means thick and thin places in the same cloth, puckers, improperly laced warp and filling, broken yarns, imperfect selvages, missing yarns, split yarns, and knots. All such flaws have a direct bearing on the life of the sheet. A 'first' is a sheet practically free from flaws. A 'second' is a sheet which is imperfect in some respect. It is possible that the wearing value of a 'second' may be as satisfactory as that of a 'first', depending on what the nature of the imperfection is.

"Observe how the sheet is hemmed. Sheeting should be torn and not cut into sheet lengths. If cut, the sheets are often crooked after laundering and the hems are uneven and drawn. The hems should be even, sewed with strong thread, and preferably sewed along the end of the hem."

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